

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of using a public communications  
network to manage the return of an item purchased by a  
consumer from a remote direct merchandiser, comprising  
5 the steps of:  
receiving return request data from a local returns  
site;  
providing return validation data to the local  
returns site, the return validation data having at least  
10 a return validation code;  
attempting a match between the return validation  
code and a code provided by the consumer; and  
if a match exists, crediting an account of the  
consumer for a return value of the returned item;  
15 wherein each of the above steps is performed using a  
public communications network.

2. The method of Claim 1, wherein the public  
communications network is the Internet.

3. The method of Claim 1, wherein the public  
communications network is the public telephone network.

4. The method of Claim 1, wherein the public  
25 communications network is a combination of Internet  
access and public telephone access.

5. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the  
steps of receiving a request for general returns  
30 information from the consumer and of providing data  
representing general returns information to the consumer.

6. The method of Claim 5, wherein the steps of  
receiving a request for general returns information and  
of providing data representing general returns  
5 information are performed using a website.

7. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the  
step of accessing return policy data representing  
disposal of the item as desired by the direct  
10 merchandiser.

8. The method of Claim 1, further comprising the  
step of providing a returns validation code to the  
consumer prior to the step of receiving return request  
15 data from the local returns site.

9. The method of Claim 8, wherein the step of  
providing a return validation code to the consumer is  
performed using a website accessed by the consumer.

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10. The method of Claim 1, wherein the steps of  
receiving return request data and of providing return  
validation data are performed using a website.

11. A method of using a public communications network to manage the return of an item purchased by a consumer from a remote direct merchandiser, comprising the steps of:

5       receiving return request data from a local shipper;  
      providing return validation data to the local shipper, the return validation data having at least a return validation code;

10       attempting a match between the return validation code and a code provided by the consumer; and

      if a match exists, crediting an account of the consumer for a return value of the returned item;

      wherein each of the above steps is performed using a public communications network.

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12. The method of Claim 11, wherein the public communications network is the Internet.

20       13. The method of Claim 11, wherein the public communications network is the public telephone network.

25       14. The method of Claim 11, wherein the public communications network is a combination of Internet access and public telephone access.

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15. The method of Claim 11, further comprising the steps of receiving a request for general returns information from the consumer and of providing data representing general returns information to the consumer.

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16. The method of Claim 15, wherein the steps of receiving a request for general returns information and of providing data representing general returns information are performed using a website.

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17. The method of Claim 11, further comprising the step of accessing return policy data representing disposal of the item as desired by the direct merchandiser.

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18. The method of Claim 11, further comprising the step of providing a returns validation code to the consumer prior to the step of receiving return request data from the local shipper.

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19. The method of Claim 18, wherein the step of providing a return validation code to the consumer is performed using a website accessed by the consumer.

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20. The method of Claim 11, wherein the steps of receiving return request data and of providing return validation data are performed using a website.